

Embattled Peer stuns top-seed in Dubai

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Shahar Peer increased the security dilemma surrounding her presence in the United Arab Emirates by producing a stunning 6-2 7-5 win over the top-seeded Caroline Wozniacki to reach the quarter-finals of the Dubai Open.

The former Israeli soldier is the first woman athlete from her country to compete in the UAE and all three of her matches have been scheduled in the easier-to-protect outside courts.

But after victories over Yanina Wickmayer, the 13th seed, Virginie Razzano, last year's runner-up, and now Wozniacki, the world number three from Denmark, the pressure to take the risk of scheduling her on the centre court has increased.

With Hamas having alleged that a founder member of its organisation was assassinated last month, and fears of tit-for-tat reprisals, Peer has been operating with guards everywhere, separate changing facilities, cameras filming everyone coming in and out of the arena, and secret interviews at hidden locations.

But once again she played with an icy intensity redolent of someone having a cause beyond herself and, apart from slightly wavering in the second set, she was more consistent, more tactically varied, and more calmly determined than the favourite.

Peer broke at once and dominated the first set with her rhythmic driving, tremendous court coverage and sudden dangerous changes of pace and direction, especially with her excellent backhand drive.

But after losing her serve to go 1-2 down in the second set Wozniacki called her father-coach on to court for a reappraisal of her deteriorating situation.

She set about trying to emulate Peer's fighting spirit, trying to match moon balls with moon balls, respond to changes of pace with surprises of her own, and to pick her moments to attack more carefully.

It helped her break back, to lead 3-2, and twice to prevent Peer from running away with the match when the world number 22 surged to 4-3 and 5-4 with further breaks of serve.

But, hard as Wozniacki fought, she gradually became flustered by her opponent's steeliness and steadiness, and by the ever-approaching spectre of defeat. "When I play her, something happens to her, something happens to me," she said later.

Once Wozniacki swished the court with her racket, several times she flung her head

to one side in disappointment, and her error ratio remained too high to make the shift in her tactical emphasis successful.

Meanwhile Peer's coach Pablo Giacobelli became more and more vocal with his mixture of aggressive-affectonate cries - "more intensity, darling" - and the sense of destiny about the course of the match increased.

Wozniacki still struggled hard, extending the final game to ten points and surviving three match points, but after another of many lengthy rallies she was pressured into a final forehand drive into the net which brought Israeli celebrations.

"It was different, for sure. I mean from the centre court where the court was a little bit slower on the centre court to playing a little bit faster courts on court one, but I understand the security issues," Wozniacki said of her distant, little-watched defeat.

It remains to be seen whether Peer's next encounter creates a similar point of view.

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